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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 1230

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINTS, PINT, SU
SUBJECT: SADIQ AL-MAHDI HAS A TEMPER TANTRUM

REF: KHARTOUM 1106

SUMMARY: SADIQ AL-MAHDI FORMER LEADER OUTLAWED UMMA PARTY AND PRINCIPAL CLAIMANT MAHDIST SECT LEADERSHIP IS SULKING IN HIS TENT AFTER DISPLAY OF PIQUE AT CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING MARCH 16. CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING WAS CHAIRED BY NIMEIRI, WHO IS POLITICALLY EMBARRASSED BY SADIQ'S PRIMA DONNA POSTURE. NIMEIRI MAY NOW HAVE TO AWAIT GESTURE FROM SADIQ BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH MAJOR DECISIONS SUCH AS CABINET CHANGES. END SUMMARY.

1. NIMEIRI'S BOLD RECONCILIATION EFFORT WITH OPPOSITION, NOTABLY SADIA AL-MAHDI, APPEARS TO HAVE HAD ITS FIRST SERIOUS STUMBLE RECENTLY. AFTER STEADY PROGRESS SINCE LAST SPRING, SADIQ'S FRUSTRATIONS AT CONSTANTLY BEING OUT-MANEUVERED BY NIMEIRI BOILED OVER LAST WEEK IN SEMI-PUBLIC SSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING. SADIQ-NIMEIRI SPAT APPARENTLY BEGAN WITH ANNOUNCEMENT MARCH 13 OF THIRTY APPOINTED MEMBERS
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OF NEW PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY. ALL BUT SIX OR SEVEN APPOINTEES WERE FORMER OFFICERS OF LAST ASSEMBLY WHO EITHER HAD NOT RUN FOR RE-ELECTION OR HAD BEEN DEFEATED AT POLLS. OTHERS INCLUDE VARIOUS OPPOSITION MEMBERS. APPOINTMENT OF FORMER INCUMBENTS PERMITTED SSU CAUCUS TO RE-ELECT SAME SPEAKER, DEPUTY SPEAKERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AS LAST ASSEMBLY WITH ONLY TWO MINOR EXCEPTIONS (REFTEL). SADIQ AL-MAHDI WAS OUTRAGED BY LIST, FOR

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HE HAD SUBMITTED 27 CANDIDATES ON UNDERSTANDING NIMEIRI HAD AGREED TO CONSULT BEFORE MAKING DIRECT APPOINTMENTS.

2. SADIQ RESIGNED FROM SSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE IN PROTEST AND HAS NOT BEEN AT MEETINGS. FATH AL-RAHMAN BASHIER, BUSINESSMAN GO-BETWEEN WHO HAS PLAYED KEY RECONCILIATION ROLE, SPENT SIX HOURS MARCH 14 WITH SADIQ AND HASSAN AL-TURABI, MOSLEM BROTHER-HOOD CHIEF, WHO ACQUIESCED TO SITUATION AT MOMENT. BESHIR ARRANGED THAT NIMEIRI MEET SADIQ MARCH 15. SADIQ STRESSED HE SHOULD BE CONSULTED ON ANY CABINET CHANGES AND HIS VIEWS OF SSU SHOULD BE VALUED, AS PER RECONCILIATION AGREEMENTS. NIMEIRI SAID IF SADIQ RESCINDED RESIGNATION FROM CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND ACCEPTED APPOINTMENT TO POLITBURO HE NEED NOT ATTEND CENTRAL COMMITTEE SESSIONS. ON MARCH 16 ANNOUNCEMENT MADE THAT FOLLOW-ING INDIVIDUALS WERE APPOINTED TO POLITBURO: SADIQ AL-MAHDI; HASSAM AL-TURABI; AHMED AL-MAHDI- PRO-NIMEIRI AND ALTERNATE CLAIMANT TO SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP OF MAHDISTS; CLEMENT MBORO, EX-REBEL AND NEW SPEAKER OF SOUTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY; SAMUEL ARUE, EX-REBEL AND NEW MIN INTERIOR IN SOUTH; AND BADR EL DIN SULIMAN, VETERAN LEFTIST AND NEW "REGEIB" OR PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESMAN OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

4. AT CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING LATE MARCH 16, NIMEIRI RESPONDED TO MURMURS AMONG MEMBERS BY SENDING FOR SADIQ TO COME AND SPEAK BRIEFLY ABOUT "NATIONAL UNITY" TO DEMONSTRATE SADIQ-NIMEIRI GOOD RELATIONS. SADIQ'S CONFIDENTIAL

CEREMONIAL ARRIVAL WITH ENTOURAGE WAS MARRED BY QUESTION TO NIMEIRI FROM FLOOR WHETHER SADIQ HAD TAKEN OATH AS SSU COMMITTEEMAN. NIMEIRI WAIVED OATH AND INVITED SADIQ TO SPEAK BEYOND OFFICIAL LIMIT. SADIQ BRUSQUELY TOLD ASSEMBLY HE WAS SPEAKING ON UNITY BECAUSE NIMEIRI ASKED HIM TO, BUT HE THEN BLASTED SSU AS MERCENARIES AND NASSERISTS. HE REVEALED CONFIDENTIAL AGREEMENTS BETWEEN HIMSELF AND NIMEIRI ON SUCH MATTERS AS CHANGING NAME OF SSU. AFTER HE STALKED OUT, VERY EMBARRASSED NIMEIRI WAS UNABLE TO ANSWER WHEN ASKED IF SADIQ WERE MEMBER OF SSU. ON MARCH 17, BESHIR ATTEMPTED ALL DAY TO FIND SADIQ AND FINALLY SENT MESSAGE ASKING HIM TO NOTIFY NIMEIRI THAT HE WILL TAKE SSU OATH AS REQUESTED. SADIQ HAS NOT REPLIED, AS FAR AS WE KNOW.

5. COMMENT: SAIDQ AND OTHER OPPOSITION MAY HAVE HALF OF ASSEMBLY VOTES ON SOME ISSUES SUCH AS EGYPTIAN RELATIONS, BUT SADIQ ALONE IS POLITICALLY TOO WEAK TO JUSTIFY DISPLAY OF ARROGANCE AND PIQUE. HIS EMOTIONAL STATE IS AGGRAVATED BY CRITICISM FROM HIS CLOSE FAMILY AND ADVISERS FOR ACCEPTING RECONCILIATION WHICH HAS APPARENTLY WEAKENED ALL ANTI-NIMEIRI FORCES. HOWEVER, SADIQ IS SAID TO RESPECT NIMEIRI PERSONALLY

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AND ATTRIBUTES "BROKEN PROMISES" TO NIMEIRI'S ADVISERS WHO
ALSO DISAPPROVE OF RECONCILIATION FOR FORMER POLITICIANS.
SADIQ'S TEMPERMENTAL DISPLAY IS WARNING TO NIMEIRI NOT TO APPEAR
HIGH-HANDED IN SELECTING NEW CABINET WHICH IS EXPECTED
MOMENTARILY. NIMEIRI CLEARLY HAS POWER TO BRUSH SADIQ
ASIDE IF HE WISHES, AND HE PROBABLY WOULD HAVE BROAD BACKING
FOR SUCH A GESTURE. WE THINK HE HAS INVESTED TOO MUCH INTO
RECONCILIATION PROCESS TO TAKE THIS APPROACH, HOWEVER,
THEREFORE, WE THINK NIMEIRI WILL ALLOW THIS LITTLE DRAMA TO
PLAY ITSELF OUT IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT CAN HAVE A HAPPY ENDING
WITH SADIQ BACK IN THE FOLD AGAIN AS THE DE FACTO LEADER OF
SUDAN'S "LOYAL" OPPOSITION. AS OF NOW, WE THINK SADIQ HAS VERY
LITTLE SUPPORT EVEN FROM OTHER MEMBERS OF ERSTWHILE OPPOSITION.
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